

The San Marino Jinja
and the globalisation of an ecological Shintō

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ABSTRACT

On the 21st June 2014, a Shintō shrine was inaugurated in the independent Republic of San Marino, as the second shrine outside the soil of Japan. The *San Marino Jinja* サンマリノ神社 has been officially supported and recognised by Jinja Honchō 神社本庁, the administrative organisation that oversees about 80,000 Shintō shrines in Japan. However, what is mainly told about Shintō, still nowadays, is that it is the most antique and purely indigenous religion of Japan, a polytheism of immanent deities, defined as *kami*, strongly connected with the Japanese soil and centred around the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, and the imperial family descending directly from her. But, if Shintō is actually such a not inclusive religion, is it possible to define this foreign shrine legitimately and consistently Shintō, on a theoretical and practical perspective? In other words, if the claims of Shintō are the ones of a Japanese religion for Japanese people only, why the San Marino Jinja has been officially inaugurated and how does a Shintō shrine operate in a different country and cultural context? Actually, as it will be possible to discover through this research, most of the pillars on which Shintō is based are not historically consistent or accurate. It will be also possible to demonstrate how historically inaccurate it is to consider Shintō an indigenous religion in the first place. Therefore to deconstruct these claims, which could obstruct a legit globalisation of it, in this research Shintō will be discussed first from a theoretical point of view. Firstly by deconstructing the general held idea of Shinto itself, following the academical debate of the last fifty years. Secondly, by presenting the new rhetoric promoted by Jinja Honcho about Shinto as the “World's new religion of ecology”, in order to increase its national and international popularity. With this theoretical background it will be then possible to analyse the phenomenon on a practical perspective. In order to do so a comparative analysis will be featured: the Ise Jingu, the oldest model reference of *jinja*, will be compared to the San Marino site. The result will demonstrate whether the European shrine presents the same operating patterns as the native one, and therefore whether is a legit instance of a successful Shinto globalisation.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

On the 21st June 2014, a Shintō shrine was inaugurated in the independent Republic of San Marino, as the second shrine outside the soil of Japan. On the contrary of the privately built shrine in the Netherlands (*Yamakage Shintō Holland Saigu*, 1981), the *San Marino Jinja* サンマリノ神社 has been officially supported and recognised by Jinja Honchō 神社本庁, the administrative organisation that oversees about 80,000 Shintō shrines in Japan.

Nevertheless, confusion and theoretical inconsistency permeate the presentation and description of the site: on fliers, webpages, and generally, in the several media used by the Republic of San Marino. For instance, on the official webpage of the shrine¹, it is stated that the *jinja* is supposed to be a monument to the Japanese victims of the 11th March 2011², and that Shintō is not a religion but a 2600 years old philosophy³. However, in the English version of the same website, it is defined as a “faith”, and it is built on the model of the *Ise Jingū* 伊勢神宮, promoted as an active site of worship for Amaterasu Omikami 天照大御神 (leading deity of the Japanese *kami's pantheon*) and object of annual visits by Japanese expatriates in Italy and Europe.

In addition to such a blurry theoretical background, the concept of Shintō itself as a “religion” is controversial and pivotal in several academic debates. What is mainly told about Shintō, still nowadays, is that it is the most antique and purely indigenous religion of Japan, a polytheism of immanent deities, defined as *kami*, strongly connected with the Japanese soil and centred around the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, and the imperial family descending directly from her. Yet, as it will be possible to discover through this research, most of the pillars on which Shintō is based are not historically consistent or accurate. It will be also possible to demonstrate how historically inaccurate it is to consider Shintō an indigenous religion in the first place.

Nevertheless, these kind of statements can be found also in some older academic texts introducing Shintō, and they are the main common description on tour guides, documentaries, photo books, and several academic and non-academic media. For instance, as even Penelope Mason presents in her *History of Japanese Art* textbook: “Shintō was

1 See at <http://www.sanmarinojinja.com/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

2 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, damaging massively the North-Eastern coast of Japan with a [magnitude](#) 9.0–9.1 (M_w), and causing the death of approximately 16000 people.

3 See at <http://www.sanmarinojinja.com/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

originally centred on the needs of an agrarian culture. Kami, supernatural being, are unseen, awe-inspiring and mostly beneficent spirits believed to dwell in such natural phenomena as rocks, trees, waterfalls, and mountains, as well as deities embodied as gods and goddesses.” And again: “At the fulcrum of the alliances that led to unification was the strongest clan, the imperial, which traces its origins to the sun goddess Amaterasu. Already the heaven-illuminating ruler of the world, she came to dominate other clans’ *kami* as an extension of her role as ancestor of the imperial clan- the same lineage from which emperors still descend in modern era.”

Moreover, as it can be read on the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Shintō is defined as the undeniable “indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Japan”⁴. These ones quoted above are just few academical examples of how Shintō is generally perceived as a consistent religious tradition, originated during Japan's mythical past, and since then uninterrupted. A religion, which is theoretically strictly connected to the Japanese scenario, and which has been shaped and used through the whole last century and more to develop nationalist propaganda and centralize the political power under the figure of the emperor, with its climax during WWII.

Thus, if Shintō is presented as such a not inclusive religion, is it possible to define this foreign shrine legitimately and consistently Shintō, on a theoretical and practical perspective? In other words, if the claims of Shintō are the ones of a Japanese religion for Japanese people only, why the San Marino Jinja has been officially inaugurated and how does a Shintō shrine operate in a different country and different cultural context?

In order to properly answer these questions, in this research I will discuss first Shintō from a theoretical point of view, and then the case of the shrine in San Marino itself, from a practical point of view.

1.2 Chapters outline

Focus of the second chapter will be the deconstruction of the set of statements which constitute an ideal obstacle to a legit European instance of shrine. In order to perform this deconstruction, I will present singularly the several statements about Shintō and introduce counter-arguments from the recent academic debate of the last fifty years. First of all, it is important to deconstruct the idea of Shintō as a religion *per se*, since the term itself is strongly ambiguous and inappropriate when applied to non-Western cultural systems. As it is

⁴ See at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shinto>, as visited 1st December 2017.

possible to read in the studies of Timothy Fitzgerald or Jason Ananda Josephson, this term becomes even more problematic in the case of non-Christian traditions. Therefore, it is particularly crucial to establish a proper terminology in order to understand whether Shintō represent a religious entity itself or not. Starting from a brief chronological examination of the development of the religious criticism, the debate from Cantwell, fifty years ago, to the position of T. Asad, J. Derrida, T. Fitzgerald, and finally Josephson himself, will be discussed.

Therefore, what is going to be deconstructed next in the second chapter is the main held idea of Shintō as a totally indigenous continuative expression of Japanese identity, connecting all the different *kami* traditions and strongly revolving around the figure of the emperor. In this way it will be possible to understand how not only Shintō has not been recognised as a consciously constructed religion throughout the whole Japanese history, but also how it has not been an unbroken or independent tradition at all. Indeed, it is not difficult to discover how Shintō is not such so consistent, or antique. As it is well explained in *An Introduction to Japanese society* by Yoshio Sugimoto, the perception of Shintō today in Japan is also mainly influenced by the role it played in Second World War Japan⁵ and the *nihonjinron* literature of the 20th century⁶. Shintō has been created in a way that it is the true expression of *Japeneseness*, the unique state of being born in Japan.

Nevertheless, this conception does not date back so far in time, as Toshio Kuroda explains in his ground-breaking article *Shintō in the history of Japanese religion*⁷. In his study, he elucidates how the several local *kami* cults have developed in Japan not necessarily in a unified institution or indigenous shape, independent from foreign influences like Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism, until the period of the Meiji Restoration (1868). Thence, it will be possible to follow the evolution of a Japanese consciousness of Shintō, from the etymological origin of the word itself, to the creation of what is defined today as Shintō in Meiji period. As it appears clear, the institutionalisation of Shintō, first, and the categorisation of it as a *kokugaku* 国学 (national science), second, was necessary for the new imperial central government to unify and consolidate the country.

With this basic knowledge, at the end of the second chapter, it will be possible to understand how most of the theoretical obstacles to imagine a *kami* worship site outside Japan are not consistent. Not only Shintō was not an existing cohesive religious entity before

5 Raveri, Massimo. *Itinerari nel sacro, l'esperienza religiosa giapponese*. Venezia, Libreria editrice Cafoscarina, 2006. "Shintō and the nationalistic ideology", page 268.

6 Sugimoto, Yoshio. *An Introduction to Japanese society*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Page 189.

7 Kuroda, Toshio, Dobbins, James C., and Gay Suzanne. *Shintō in the History of Japanese Religion*. Journal of Japanese.

the end of the 19th century, but most of these claims by Shintō representatives have been established just in modern era, in order to supply to political necessities. Most of the different original local *kami* beliefs have been the result of regional heritage and a multitude of external influences (like Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism from the continent), which unlikely would represent any kind of nationalistic issue in exporting a shrine outside the country's borders. Essentially, at this point in the reading, it will be possible to distinguish terminologically between *kami* worship traditions, as the ritual complex of different folk beliefs around Japan, and what is defined as Shintō. The latter, indeed, will be always displayed only in order to refer to the constructed religion, institutionalised after Meiji Restoration.

Subsequently, in the third chapter it will be possible to explore the backstage process of creation of the San Marino Jinja's project and physical site. Having just deconstructed some of the old statements criticised by the recent academic debate, then it is useful to understand what are the new bases on which the Association of Shintō Shrines brought this project to life. Firstly, it is necessary to introduce the Association itself, Jinja Honchō, which is the governative office in charge of managing Shintō shrines and matters from the post-war period. And to follow, its history in the context of Japanese modern history and its involvement in the right-wing political scenario of Japan, in order to understand properly the background of this phenomenon. Secondly, I will analyse the point of views on Shintō of exponents of Jinja Honchō connected to the Republic of San Marino: they will elucidate at the same time the new rhetoric introduced in Shintō during the last few decades, and most importantly the theoretical basis to the creation of the official European site itself. In detail, the new ecological approach of Shintō will be analysed, as presented by exponents of Jinja Honchō like Hideaki Kase in his articles and interviews⁸; then, the critic to this new Shintō ecological globalisation by Aike P. Rots in his article⁹.

In the second part of the chapter then, the development of the idea of a shrine in San Marino will be presented, with reference to first-hand sources as personal interviews and correspondences with the actual chief priest (gūji 宮司) of the shrine, Francesco Brigante. Through his point of view on the whole process, it will be possible to read how related the San Marino project is to the new "ecological paradigm" (as Rots refers to it). From his personal journey to the priesthood in the *kami* worship rituals, during his training in the Dewa

⁸ See at <http://www.ubraintv.com/watch.php?id=711>, as visited 1st December 2017.

⁹ Rots, Aike Peter. *Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation. The Shintō Environmentalist paradigm and the rediscovery of Chinju no Mori*. Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 42/2: 205-233. Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

Sanzan sacred area, Japan, to his own education in the Jinja Honchō's Shintō, it is possible to perceive how strongly pervasive the Association has been in promoting an idea of Shintō and its new directions toward ecology and globalisation.

Even though the focus of the chapter is going to be the background information to the inauguration of the site, a brief introduction to the environment of San Marino, a description of the inauguration of the shrine and further details will be featured during the discussion. Thus, at the end of the third chapter, it is going to be clear how and why Jinja Honchō constructed Shintō in the past few decades to be a champion of an international ecological culture, legitimising this globalisation process of their constructed religion.

Eventually, in the fourth section of this research, I will scrutinize the elements which could represent a practical legitimacy of a foreign based shrine of Shintō. After the previous chapters, in which I approached firstly the constructed religion itself, and secondly the San Marino Jinja on a theoretical base, it should be clear how it is not a contradiction at all to think of Shintō on a global perspective. Therefore, in the third chapter the focus will be put in particular on the analysis of the ways the San Marino Jinja exists and operates in the environment of its small independent country. In order to do so, I will make a comparative analysis between the ways a native Japanese shrine operates, and then verify if the San Marino case presents the same patterns and elements. Even though his way of portraying the history of the kami cults will be argued throughout the research, I will refer to Inoue Nobutaka's articles in *Shintō - A Short History*¹⁰ as a main source for understanding how a Shintō shrine operates in a specific cultural and time frame. While referring to his study, it is important to keep in mind the notions discussed in the third chapter about the difference between *kami* worship traditions and what is defined Shintō. Indeed, in his investigation of Shintō, there is a persistent idea of this religion having been existing throughout the Japanese history, even though it went through a multitude of changes and institutional reformations. Nevertheless, it presents itself as a useful source to understand the mechanics through which shrines exist in Japan, if read with a critical approach.

The conclusions will follow in order to sum up the most important points dealt in this research, the results in the reality of the San Marino Jinja, and eventually, to guess the future developments of this shrine instance and other possible similar projects in Europe.

10 Inoue, Nobutaka; Ito Satoshi, and Endo Jun. *Shintō - A Short History*. 2003. Translated by Mark Teewen and John Breen. Routledge Curzon.

Chapter 2

2.1 Deconstructing Shintō

As it was already possible to read from the introductory chapter of this research, there is no way the term Shintō can be considered unambiguous. Shintō, as it is intended today by the majority of pop-media, tourist guidebooks, academical and non-academical media, is supposed to be an unique indigenous religion, which is based on polytheistic cults of imminent natural deities, strictly connected with the Japanese environmental scenario and the imperial family. Clearly taking in account these claims, would make a shrine of such an exclusive religion really difficult to imagine in the heart of a small European country like San Marino. Moreover, it would be difficult to understand why there is so much ambiguity about the essence of the San Marino site, defined by its own founders alternatively as a secular monument or a shrine; and about Shintō itself, defined alternatively as a religion or a philosophy, on the official websites related to it¹¹.

Thus, it appears necessary to perform a critical analysis and a deconstruction of these claims about Shintō, in order to be able to fully understand why it is not impossible to conceive a San Marino Jinja. Indeed, as already stated, aim of this chapter will be the deconstruction of these positions, mostly by taking in account the academic debate which took place in the last fifty years. First of all, I will discuss the terminology involved in the research: in other words, the specific term religion applied to the several *kami* folk traditions. As it will be possible to read in the following paragraphs, the term religion appears tricky and historically inaccurate when applied to non-Western, non-Christian, cultures. As it will be better explained in the following paragraphs, this is the particular case of Japan, which did not have any relatable word to religion before the end of 19th century.

Right after having established the inaccuracy of this term, it is important also to understand the process through which the multitude of local folk *kami* traditions have been reshaped by the government into the constructed religion, which still today is referred as Shintō. In order to perform this deconstruction, I will mostly refer to the studies by Josephson and Kuroda. Through their insights on the process it will be possible to demonstrate how historically this “religion” has been mostly just a political compromise.

At the end of the reading of this section of the research, it will be then possible to understand how something like Shintō does not represent a consistent, continuative religion

¹¹See at <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

at all, and there is no historical characteristic that could obstruct theoretically a globalisation of it. It will be clear how *kami* cults have been easily re-shaped by their main actors time to time. Besides, it shall be possible to comprehend how Shintō continues being re-thought now by its chief organisation, the Jinja Honchō.

2.2 The inaccuracy of the term religion

Reading descriptions of what Shintō is in several kind of sources, from encyclopedias, textbooks, to tourist guidebooks, one main term occurs always: religion. In particular, Shintō is not only labelled as a generic world religion, but it is identified as the most primitive and true religious expression of Japanese people. Encyclopedia Britannica too, gives a definition which supports this interpretation: “Shintō, indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Japan. The word Shintō, which literally means “the way of kami” (kami means “mystical,” “superior,” or “divine,” generally sacred or divine power, specifically the various gods or deities), came into use in order to distinguish indigenous Japanese beliefs from Buddhism, which had been introduced into Japan in the 6th century ce. Shintō has no founder, no official sacred scriptures in the strict sense, and no fixed dogmas, but it has preserved its guiding beliefs throughout the ages.”¹²

Thus, there is no better first step to do so than critically analysing the term “religion” itself. Not only it is important to determine a specific and correct terminology in order to fully understand this important feature of Japanese history, society and culture, but it is necessary in order to dispel lingering doubts about the essence of Shintō in the context of the San Marino Jinja.

Therefore, why it is historically inaccurate to attribute the term “religion” to what is defined as Shintō? Even before analysing the hypothetical reasons to apply this label to Shintō in the Japanese context, it might be useful to analyse the concept of religion, in general. Lexically speaking, it is evident how the term religion has not been shaped in most of the world’s languages before their contact with the European ones, as in the majority of cases during the era of colonialism. This is the case of Japan, which did not have any specific word for *shūkyō* 宗教 (“religion” as established at the end of the 19th century), before the encounter with the American diplomats in 1853.

As Jason Ananda Josephson points out in the *Introduction of The invention of religion in Japan*, “there are few functionally proximate terms to *religio* in ancient languages.

¹² See at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shintō>, as visited 1st December 2017.

There is no parallel to the word ‘religion’ in proto-Indo-European. Even classical Greek had no single term that functioned as an analog to the modern *religion*. Our contemporary terminology can be traced to a single common root in the Latin term *religio*, which in turn has several possible etymologies. Regardless of its origins, in pre-Christian Roman usage, *religio* generally referred to a prohibition or an obligation. In either case it was often but not necessarily connected to the gods, and it could represent a kind of social duty, and was almost synonymous with the word for scruple (Latin, [Lt.] *scrupulus*)”¹³.

It is not that what we identify today as religion was not existing at all before modern times, but it was surely perceived differently even by early-modern Europeans. The concept of religion of course is mainly Eurocentric, but did not appear in Europe either before the 17th century. Not even in the Bible, Quran or other holy texts it is possible to find such term, or even with a similar meaning as nowadays. Etymologically, the modern development of the word derives mainly from the 17th century split between the Catholic and Protestant churches of Christian faith and the subsequent period of colonialism, which brought the European thinkers to face cultures of completely different religious behaviours.

What was difficult in the definition of the Shintō case for the scholars of the late 19th century was the fact that Shintō was impossible to define properly with any Euro-American terminology. With the Meiji Restoration (1868) several cults and traditions, collected under the name Kyōha Shintō 教派神道, went through a secularization process, but Shintō managed to avoid it because considered as a “national science” in the first Constitution of Japan, even before being considered a religion itself.

However, that was the historical moment in which Shintō started being defined as an independent entity. This was not the case during all the previous eras, as in the Kamakura period it was mainly synonymous with Buddhism¹⁴, with which was strongly blended. But, from the end of 19th century on, Shintō started having its own independent stage on the cultural scenario of Japan. Shintō began to be understood as a useful tool to unify the country, and in order to do so all the imperial propaganda around the mythological origins of the nation was intensified. “In its final form, the Japanese constitution would firmly assert the divine descent of the emperor and root his authority his embodiment of the will of heaven. Service to this imperial cult as a basic duty of all Japanese subjects would stand side by side with religious freedom as twin pillars of official policy”¹⁵.

13 Josephson, Jason Ananda. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. University of Chicago Press, 2012. Page 17.

14 Ibid. Page 99.

15 Josephson, Jason Ananda. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. University of Chicago Press, 2012. Page 229.

Although scholars of the period would see the general Western-like secularised process with freedom of religion contradictory with the mythico-religious central role of the emperor, it was not actually really different from Constitutions of that time in Europe¹⁶. This image of the emperor as the pivotal figure of the country was slowly but steadily empowered during the following decades, reaching its peak with the propaganda of the WWII decades. The State Shintō, Kokka Shintō 国家神道, as it was later defined by the United States occupation army to differentiate it from the traditional folkloristic practices, was a strong nationalistic ideology which brought the country under a strong cultural and military unity until the end of the world conflict. Subsequently, during the American occupation, the State and the religious entity of Shintō have been separated. In 1945, the Allied forces dictated a band forbidding the country to support in any way the shrines and claiming the human nature of the emperor. What followed was the institution of a Shrine Shintō 神社神道, which was the filtered version of the Kokka Shintō, not featuring all the nationalistic propaganda anymore, but still separated in content from the sectarian Kyōha Shintō.

In short, this is the process through which the multitude of folk *kami* beliefs in Japan came in touch with the strongly Eurocentric concept of “religion”. Although they started being institutionalised under the name Shintō in a national scientific shape, within the second half of the 20th century, these traditions were eventually considered as one religious entity, as still nowadays. In general, after the construction of Shintō, during the period of time in between the Meiji Restoration and the Second World War, the main supported idea of an indigenous Japanese religion, independent from external influences, has never been contested. The several media which have been portraying Japan in the last six or seven decades have continuously referred to Shintō without doubts concerning its historical background, usually categorising it under the label “world religion”, next to Hinduism, Sikhism and so many ex-colonial areas' traditions.

Nevertheless, a real academic debate on the possibility to apply universally the term religion to other cultures started around the mid 20th century with a ground-breaking position of Wilfred Cantwell Smith. In particular, he saw in religion a Western label of modern origin, which got applied to foreign passive cultural systems, but which actually did not represent the identity of those cultures. As Smith points out in his works, most of what we call religions and religious founders, were not conscious of being part of something which was going under this category. Indeed, the term itself is present in none of the world religions holy books.

16 For instance the Spanish constitution of 1876 states in its article 48: “La persona del Rey es sagrada e inviolable” (“The person of the King is sacred and inviolable”).

Even in the Qurán it is not featured, although Islam is the cultural entity with the strongest self-identity consciousness, as presented in the lines of the holy text. If this was the case with Islam it was also with other major religions like Buddhism, Hinduism or Shintō, in which cultural backgrounds there was not a word for religion until modern times, when they came to terms with a certain level of cultural self-consciousness in comparison to the Western cultural asset¹⁷.

After the groundbreaking position of Smith several other scholars started questioning the possibility to apply religion as a universally valid category. Among them the most noticeable ones have been Talal Asad, Jacques Derrida to Daniel Dubuisson, all of them stating that the term religion is not “an universal entity but a culturally specific category that took shape among Christian-influenced Euro-American intellectuals and missionaries”¹⁸.

In the specific Japanese case, no word related to the concept was existing before the adoption of the word *shūkyō* in the late 19th century. Even though today the main supported idea about Shintō is the one of a religion, several scholars maintained a skeptical position toward the matter. Among those ones, Timothy Fitzgerald is the one of the main contributors to the study of the Japanese “religions”, strongly affirming how this term is completely inappropriate to refer to cultural values systems as a cross-cultural analytical concept.

Indeed, in his article from the 1997, *A critique of ‘religion’ as a cross-cultural category*¹⁹, Fitzgerald argues the inadequacy of the term religion in general in the academic environment, and then analyses the Japanese and Indian cases in his research, in particular. According to the way the term is used by many scholars, the word is unclearly used to refer to the personal choices of individuals who commit to a church and rituals of a specific faith, as if it is a fully rational secular choice, although the term underlines several “soteriological nuances”²⁰. His critique to the other scholars working in the religious studies environment is that they do not realise that terms like religion, underlying a certain kind of belief in god or gods, cannot be empirically understood outside the context of the cultural institutions and symbolic systems. According to Fitzgerald the term religion provokes the loss of the analytical focus, as it blends the borders of studying something secularly cultural like the institutions and rituals, and something metaphysical, as the personal commitment of an individual with a certain faith. As he argues that anthropology itself is not a genuine study of

17 Cantwell Smith, Wilfred. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Fortress Press, 1962. Page 106.

18 Josephson, Jason Ananda. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. University of Chicago Press, 2012. Page 3.

19 Fitzgerald, Timothy. *A critique of religion as a cross-cultural category*. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Volume 9, Issue 2, pages 91 – 110, 1997.

20 Ibid. Page 92.

the Other, rather than the study of a changing Other in comparison to an Ourselves, Shintō takes part to the group of systems “which repackage genuinely traditional institutions in a new form”, inspired by the concepts brought to Japan by Western diplomacy during the Meiji Restoration and American occupation after WWII.

Certainly not all the scholars agreed to this kind of position. For instance, Ian Reader always stood up for a strong religiosity in Japan, throughout all his extensive production of articles and studies about the religions of Japan. As Fitzgerald quotes, and criticises, in his article *Religion and the Secular in Japan: Problems in history, social anthropology, and the study of religion*²¹, Reader is strongly defending the existence of Japanese religions. But according to Fitzgerald this position is not consistent through Reader’s studies as his “multiple references to religion, or the religious world of the Japanese, and his repeated distinction between overtly religious acts and those rituals that are merely secular, can only be understood as an attempt to assert a special, distinct and irreducible realm of experience, feeling and action”²². But for example “Reader himself has pointed out that the idea of religion was imported during the Meiji era, he never considers the arguments that this is a Western myth, one that liberal ecumenical missionaries and others have been exporting to the rest of the world since the days of Max Muller. Furthermore, it is unjustified by the actual data that is cited by the author, which often forces him to virtually deny what he is asserting within the same paragraph”²³.

Furthermore, Fitzgerald is not the only one who criticised positions like the one of Reader. Another scholar who supported the inaccuracy of the term religion applied to the Japanese case is Toshio Kuroda. Also Kuroda states some points about the inadequacy of the term religion, and how Shintō has been several times misunderstood. To do so, he argues that: Shintō did not maintain the same meaning and historical continuity; what is considered pure Shintō, in its imperial cult based on the Ise Shrine, was perceived originally as an extension of Buddhism; subsequently, Shintō started playing a secular role in society, juxtaposed to Buddhism itself; eventually, the term “religion” has been applied to Shintō only in the last century cultural “world religion” frame. In other words from Fitzgerald himself: “the word religion, with its theological and supernaturalist resonances, is analytically redundant. It picks nothing distinctive and it clarifies nothing. It merely distorts the field”²⁴.

21 Fitzgerald, Timothy. “Religion” and “the Secular” in Japan. Electronic journal of contemporary Japanese studies, Discussion Paper 3, 2003. As seen 1st December 2017.

22 Ibid. As seen 1st December 2017

23 Ibid. As seen 1st December 2017.

2.3 The inaccuracy of a nationalistic interpretation of kami beliefs

After having presented some counter-arguments to the concept of Shintō as a religion, it is useful to analyse the way it has been constructed. Once this will be clear, it will appear evident how Shintō has been shaped by its agents in the past, as well as it continues being shaped now.

The main statements about Shintō, independently from the fact it might be labelled as a religion or not, are that: it presents features of a primitive religion, worshipping natural elements and avoiding impurities; it is centred around the imperial family and the Ise shrine, vowed to their ancestor Amaterasu Omikami; it has roots in Japanese ancient mythology but lacks a holy text, or system of doctrine. Following the groundbreaking research by Toshio Kuroda, *Shintō in the History of Japanese Religion*²⁵, published in the 80s, it will be demonstrated how: first, the word Shintō itself existed already before the 19th century, but it had several foreign influences and different meanings throughout time; second, Shintō lacks of independence as a cultural entity throughout history, as *kami* beliefs were strongly incorporated in Buddhist rituals; third, the exclusiveness of Shintō and its nationalistic rhetoric, as it was mostly institutionalised from the kokugaku categorisation to the WWII propaganda.

First, as Kuroda points out, Shintō is believed to have existed throughout time, aside from differences in institutions and shapes. Nevertheless, as he presents through an etymological analysis of the word itself, it might have had several different meanings and nuances, from the origins of Japanese culture until the institutionalised religion we all know nowadays. The first time the word Shintō appears in early Japanese literature is in the *Nihon Shoki* (720), where the word Shintō has been claimed to refer to Japan's indigenous religion, well distinguished from Buddhism. Nevertheless, in China the same combination of characters 神道 meant several folk religions, Taoism, or sometimes even Buddhism itself. Keeping in mind that the *Nihon Shoki* is an historical chronicle of Japan, compiled in the 8th century following strictly the model of the Chinese court, it would be difficult that the word Shintō would be included as a reference to the specific “kami way”, independent from any other form of tradition. Indeed, another interpretation by Kuroda is that Shintō might imply directly Taoism, since Shintō was a word used in China in that period to refer specifically to

24 Fitzgerald, Timothy. *A critique of religion as a cross-cultural category*. Method & Theory in the Study of Religion, Volume 9, Issue 2, pages 91 – 110, 1997. Page 93.

25 Kuroda, Toshio, Dobbins, James C., and Gay Suzanne. *Shintō in the History of Japanese Religion*. Journal of Japanese Studies 7, no. 1 (1981): 1. doi:10.2307/132163.

it,. Moreover, there are undeniable proofs of the huge influence of the continental court on the ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, governative institutions of the young Japanese court of the 8th century. Thus, it is already clear how not even the word Shintō itself represent a distinct entity from any other tradition in an uninterrupted way from its origins until nowadays.

Second, another interesting aspect to underline is how in medieval times Shintō was strongly blended with Buddhism. With the progressive spread of Buddhism throughout the country and the Japanese court, from already the Nara period (710-794), “Shintō was drawn into this Buddhist system as one segment of it, and its religious content was replaced with Buddhist doctrine, particularly *mikkyo* and Tendai philosophy”²⁶. The resulting system, defined as *kenmitsu Buddhism* 顯密, maintained its pivotal role in the Japanese religious scene mostly until the 16th century. One of the most famous and important concepts is the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹, in other words, the theory according to which the *kami* are an alternative manifestation of the Buddha. As Kuroda asserts again: “Shintō, therefore, was independent neither in existence nor in system of thought. It was merely one means among many by which the Buddha guides and converts sentient beings”²⁷. This is the period of time in which what is defined as Shintō today has never been less independent from foreign influences. Although the Ise shrine, core of the imperial *credo*, maintained ancient rites (mostly Taoist in origin), it did not avoid completely Buddhist knowledge. It is historically proven that Buddhist priests visited periodically the shrine and Ise priests themselves possessed a valuable Buddhist knowledge themselves.

Third, it appears clear how a strong institutionalisation of Shintō as an independent entity took place not before the end of 19th century. Although at the end of medieval times the Ise school already attempted to promote the *kami* rituals, embellishing them and adding contents which were not Buddhist in nature, what was called Shintō was still a sphere of Buddhism, yet authentically Japanese in essence. It was indeed in this period of time when, as Kuroda indicates, “this meaning of the word paved the way for later stages in which Shintō became a term or Japan’s indigenous religion”²⁸. A real Shintō entity was born only after the encounter with the Western concept of religion itself, and the Meiji Restoration. Surprisingly, what happened was the negation of Shintō as a religion in the Meiji Constitution, released in the February 1889. This was the consequence of the mandatory order from the American diplomats to open the country not only physically, but also culturally, with the freedom of

26 Kuroda, Toshio, Dobbins, James C., and Gay Suzanne. *Shintō in the History of Japanese Religion*. Journal of Japanese Studies 7, no. 1 (1981): 1. doi:10.2307/132163. Page 18.

27 Ibid. Page 18.

28 Ibid. Page 25.

religion. This would have weakened the centralised imperial power, but giving priority to a non-religious Shintō permitted the ruling family to guarantee their position politically and culturally. As Josephson explains: “The concept of a non-religious Shintō was useful to the Meiji state because it allowed them to interweave Shintō into the fabric of the government, and to mandate the performance of Shintō rituals without contravening new guarantees of religious freedom”²⁹. The most sectarian branches of Shintō went through a process of serious secularisation, while the State Shintō was proposed as an actual science, instead of a faith. Shintō as an *hongaku* 本学 (“original science”, or “science of the origins”), would be the ancient Japanese wisdom which European and Chinese sciences managed to unravel throughout centuries of research. For instance, it would have already explained the heliocentric system through the central position of Amaterasu, the sun, and her imperial lineage in the Japanese pantheon. In order to sum up, it is possible to affirm that Shintō existed also as a non-religion, as Josephson defines it, to be then defined again as a faith after WWII.

Thus, it can be affirmed that before modern times, and in particular before the appearance of the American warships on the Japanese coasts in 1853, Shintō did not exist as an independent religion at all, or lacking any influence from external sources. Back then, it was not intended as an independent cultural entity, since it was deeply entwined with continental influences like Confucianism, Taoism and especially Buddhism until the early-modern Age. It is definitely legit to say that defining Shintō completely indigenous is not correct: since its origins there has never been a continuative tradition fully independent from foreign influences in modelling and unifying all the popular cultural substrata of the archipelago.

2.4 Shintō and the folkloristic kami cults traditions

After the defeat of Japan in WWII, Shintō has been classified as a religious legal entity during the American occupation. This is the period in which Jinja Honchō, the Association of Shintō Shrines was institutionalised as the governative office entitled to manage rituals and sites of this newly recognised religion.

What was possible to understand with this section of the research is that to a certain extent there has always been a certain kind of indigenous religious identity in Japan, but not necessarily it correspond to the claims which have been promoted through the decades about

²⁹ Josephson, Jason Ananda. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. University of Chicago Press, 2012. Page 95.

Shintō itself. Now it should be clear how mostly those statements are historically inconsistent and there is no specific reason to negate a chance of globalisation. On the whole, the several local folkloristic *kami* cults in Japan underwent several shifts in content and terminology. As seen in the previous pages, nowadays they would be labelled under the term religion, although they have not been considered one for several ages by Japanese people themselves.

In conclusion of this chapter, there are still several unresolved doubts about the proper term to categorise Shintō. For this reason, in the following sections it must be remembered that when the word Shintō is displayed, it is only to refer to the religious entity which has been officialized in post-war period, and mostly directed by Jinja Honchō. On the other hand, when there is the need to refer to the previously existing *kami* cults traditions, it must be remembered that they do not correspond necessarily to the essentially nationalistic statements shared about what Shintō should be.

Chapter 3

3.1 The San Marino Jinja, the inauguration of the first official shrine in Europe

After several years of bureaucratic fights in the political board of the Republic of San Marino, Francesco Brigante with the support of the committee of the Japan-San Marino Friendship Society, JSFS, managed to give birth to the project of a Shintō shrine in this small Republic, in 2013. The process was far from being smoothly approved by the government of the city, really suspicious by the entity and content of this “religion” from Japan. Nevertheless, in 2014 the project managed to be complete and in San Marino now it is possible to visit the only official shrine existing outside Japan.

Throughout the second chapter of this research it has been possible to demonstrate how the generally held claims about what has been called Shintō after the Meiji Restoration are essentially not historically consistent. Indeed, if those statements are blindly accepted, it would be difficult to think to export such an exclusive tradition, strongly connected to the Japanese people’s cultural supremacy, in another land. Especially in an environment with such a different background and environment like the one of San Marino, embraced by the deeply catholic Italian country. Nevertheless, now it should be possible to understand how this tradition is the product of a voluntarily construction dated in the late 19th century, not easily possible to categorise as a religion. But also, how it is absolutely not a continuative system from the origins of the Japanese identity until nowadays. Last but not least, it is clear how it is not historically an exclusive Japanese product, as it is strongly entwined with foreign influences from Confucianism, Taoism and especially Buddhism in the rituals, ceremonies and thoughts, which constitute the core of the *kami* worship itself.

If there is no theoretical contradiction in the idea of inaugurating a Shintō shrine outside Japan, still it is important to understand how and why the Jinja Honchō, the Association of Shintō Shrines, decided to create an official site in Europe, and in particular in San Marino. In order to answer to these questions and to understand the whole process of creation of this innovative project, in this chapter I will firstly explain what the Association of Shintō Shrines actually is. Secondly, I will present the new rhetoric by Jinja Honchō about Shintō as “the World’s new religion of ecology”³⁰, and critically analyse it, under the light of the theoretical insights featured in the previous chapter. Thirdly, I will present Francesco

30 See <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/en/>, main page of the San Marino Jinja in English language, as visited 1st December 2017.

Brigante, the gūji of the San Marino Jinja, and explain how he came in touch with the Jinja Honchō and Shintō itself, and how he brought this project to life.

3.2 Jinja Honchō, the Association of Shintō Shrines

As already briefly presented in the previous chapter, the Association of Shintō Shrines is an organisation connected with the Japanese government, enrolled to administrate the official shrines of the Shrine Shintō, inaugurated and developed after World War II. Following its foundation during February 1946, it “has worked to encourage Shintō rituals, to promote the prosperity of Shintō shrines, and to support the continuity of Japanese culture and traditions”³¹, as described on their official website.

As Nobutaka Inoue resumes its creation history, “the modern shrine system assumed its basic form in the Early Meiji period (1868-1912); it acquired stability of structure as it developed in parallel with, and in the closest possible connection to, the emerging ‘modern emperor state’. This shrine system endured for the best part of three-quarters of a century, until the end of the Second World War. The religious policies of the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ) at the end of the war ensured that the modern shrine system was once again transformed in the shortest space of time; the result was the post-war era in which the Jinja Honchō, the umbrella organisation for the majority of Japan’s shrines, has dominated shrine affairs.”³²

Although Jinja Honchō, as born after the Second World War, was a new religious institution it inherited several significant elements from the past. After the war, Shintō became soon a juridical legal person (shūkyō hojin, 宗教法人), totally equal to Buddhism in front of the law. On the other hand, substantial changes took place differentiating the previous modern shrine system and the present post-war institution, although not spontaneously arisen, but under foreign pressure. However, most of the characteristics of the previous institution (the *Jingiin*, the shrine affairs related bureau of the Home Ministry existing until 1940) were maintained active, like the supremacy of Ise Jingū, the administration of the shrines throughout the country and the training of their priests. In particular, it is interesting to read from the document *Keishin seikatsu no koryo* (“Principles for a life of *kami*-reverence”) by the Association of Shintō Shrines itself, how it is important to: “Respect the emperor as

³¹ See at <http://www.jinjaHonchō.or.jp/en/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

³² Inoue, Nobutaka, Ito Satoshi, and Endo Jun. *Shintō - A Short History*. 2003. Translated by Mark Teewen and John Breen. Routledge Curzon. Page 159.

mediator of the wishes of the Sun Goddess; be sure to follow his wishes; pray for good fortune for the people of Japan, and of all nations; and to pray, too, that the world may live in peace and prosperity”³³.

Thus, it is clear how at the end of the 40s Jinja Honchō, is still focused on the same rhetoric of Shintō as a cohesive religion, emperor centred and related to nationalistic ideologies. It is not a surprise to discover how strongly connected Jinja Honchō has been with the politics, and in particular with right-wing exponents inside the Liberal Democratic Party. Several results of their interdependence could be seen in a certain number of laws like the legal recognition of the *Kimigayo*, the National Anthem, and the *Hinomaru*, the National Flag, and so on.

3.3 Shintō as “the World’s new religion of ecology”³⁴

In June 2014, exactly in the same period of the inauguration of the San Marino Jinja, the Association of the Shintō Shrines hosted in the premises of Ise Jingū an international and interreligious conference about the concept of religion and ecological sustainability. The event has been organised in collaboration with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), “a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programs, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices”³⁵. Besides, it hosted representatives from several religions, like Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Christian denominations, and Sikhism.

The aim of all these efforts by Jinja Honchō to reshape the international image of Shintō looks ambiguous and strongly political intended. As Ugo Dessi underlines in his study *Japanese Religions and Globalisation*³⁶, in the last few decades Japanese religious institutions are serving as a carrier of globalisation and interfaith dialogue by taking trends around the world and internalising them. In particular, Shintō and the institutional agents behind it, started shaping itself as an undeniable religion of ecology.

Nevertheless, as Aike P. Rots reminds in his article about this Shintō environmentalism, *Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation; the Shintō Environmentalist paradigm and the rediscovery of Chinju no Mori*: “anybody familiar with the recent academic studies of

33 Inoue, Nobutaka, Ito Satoshi, and Endo Jun. *Shintō - A Short History*. 2003. Translated by Mark Teeuwen and John Breen. Routledge Curzon. Page 171.

34 See <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/en/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

35 See http://www.arcworld.org/about_ARC.asp, as visited 1st December 2017.

36 Dessi Ugo. *Japanese Religions and Globalisation*. Rotledge Studies in Asian Religion and Philosophy. London: Routledge, 2013.

the history of Shintō and kami worship can confirm, the notion of Shintō as an essentially apolitical prehistoric tradition of nature worship is historically inaccurate. Although this image continues to be spread in popular scientific books, websites, social media, and tourist-guidebooks, by Shintō actors as well as non-Japanese Shintō *aficionados*, it has been challenged convincingly by a number of historians”. What is called Shintō today “is grounded largely in early-modern ideological inventions, which were given concrete shape in the subsequent Meiji period”³⁷.

All these features of Shintō have naturally been historically connected with the role that Japan played in the Second World War, and appears evident how Jinja Honchō is putting great effort in reshaping it into a new eco-friendly facade, which it is easier to feel sympathy with. As Rots underlines, “the current right-wing national government has made some significant changes to the secular and pacifist postwar constitution, while attempting to reintroduce imperial symbolism into the public sphere, rewrite the national historical narrative by denying Japanese war crimes, and explore the possibilities of nationalising Yasukuni Jinja 靖国神社. Significantly, it does so with the support of Jinja Honchō and its influential political lobby organisation, the Shintō Seiji Renmei 神道政治連盟.”³⁸ And the best way for Jinja Honchō to do so is to reshape the international held image of Shintō, with all the cultural and political results which would follow. This is especially clear in the way the English and Japanese versions of the same webpage of the event³⁹, in which the former version for foreign readers is more focused on the ecological issue than the latter.

Not surprisingly, there is an increasing popularity of Shintō in the last decades as a proof of the success of this new ecological propaganda, through the depoliticization of Shintō on its surface. This is interesting since it is not only a phenomenon on a national scale, but especially on an international one, as it can be seen through the creation of several English-language online Facebook groups like “Shintō, religion of the Forest”⁴⁰, or “Inari faith international”⁴¹. Several members of those online communities share on the web their own ways to experience Shintō beliefs and rituals in their everyday life, and they are strongly connected to the respect and worship of nature and its *kami* entities. Far from being conscious or concerned with the ambiguity of the term Shintō itself, all these followers share the

37 Rots, Aike Peter. *Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation. The Shintō Environmentalist paradigm and the rediscovery of Chinju no Mori*. Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 42/2: 205-233. Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. Page 207.

38 Ibid. Page 207.

39 See at http://www.arcworld.org/about_ARC.asp, as visited 1st December 2017.

40 See at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/224216070927645/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

41 See at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/inarifaith/1399561140318602/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

common idea that it is a primordial religion of animistic nature worship, teaching an ancient ecological wisdom on how to live closer to nature, in perfect harmony with it. Clearly, on one hand, big part of the several ancient local *kami* worship traditions, which constitute the basis of Shintō, are truly connected to the natural world, as *kami* are immanent deities, and not transcendent like the monotheistic religions' concept of god for instance. But, on the other hand, they do not consider all the actual historical creation and development from Meiji Restoration of what they define as Shintō, which went through a process of re-classification as a religious legal person (shūkyō hojin 宗教法人) only in the new constitution after WWII.

Although this appears to be mostly a political move, it must be recognised that throughout Japanese history, there are several episodes of real commitment by shrines to protect the “sacred forest” (chinju no mori 鎮守の杜) of their premises. Nevertheless, the first appearances of consistent environmental issues on public or official publications do not date back earlier than around the 1980s. As Rots claims: “Still, it was not until the late 1990s or early 2000s that the notion of Shintō as an ecological tradition gained widespread acceptance, as illustrated by the sharp increase in the number of books and articles addressing this topic around that time”⁴². Indeed, during the 20th century no main political position has been taken by the government against the massive deforestation and shrine-woods destruction that followed the process of industrialisation of the country.

In the end, it is clear that this ecological issue is not an historically pre-existing concern for Jinja Honchō, as much as it is to portray under a better light their political agenda. As Rots again states in his article “the argument that Shintō is increasingly open-minded and cosmopolitan does not do justice to the current Japanese political reality, and to the ideological ambiguity characterising institutions such as Jinja Honchō”. Although it must be taken with critical skepticism, this is the theoretical background and one of the fundamental reasons why the San Marino Jinja, or the ecological event at Ise Jingū quoted before, have been created and hosted. Even though Jinja Honchō's approach appears strongly political intended, discussing the political background reasons and aims of the Association is not consistent to the purpose of this research, which is focused on the phenomenon of exporting *kami* worship sites and rituals abroad, and to which extent they operate similarly to the native ones.

42 Rots, Aike Peter. *Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation. The Shintō Environmentalist paradigm and the rediscovery of Chinju no Mori*. Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 42/2: 205-233. Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. Page 216.

3.4 Francesco Brigante and the San Marino Jinja's inauguration

As it is possible to read with attention from the San Marino Jinja's official website⁴³, the shrine is described as an ideological ambiguous entity in the landscape of the catholic Italian and San Marino environments, as the borders between secular monument and religious building are strongly blended by the founders themselves.

In particular, it is possible to spot some kind of substance discrepancy in the different language versions of the home page of the website. In the Italian and French languages' main pages indeed, it is clearly stated that the shrine is a “Monumento in memoria delle migliaia di vittime del Grande Terremoto del Tohoku che l'11 marzo 2011 si abbatté nel cuore del Giappone” (“monument in memory of the thousands of victims of the Great earthquake of Tohoku, which attacked the heart of Japan the 11th March 2011”), and “primo monumento di stile Shintoista presente in Europa” (“first monument in Shintō style, to be found in Europe”), underlining that “lo Shintō non è una religione”⁴⁴ (“Shintō is not a religion”). On the other hand, in the English version of the same page the monumental aspect is completely ignored and most of the attention is given to the religious aspect of the building and to Shintō, defined as a “religion” itself. The reason for this discrepancy has been well explained by the gūji of the shrine through an extensive personal correspondence and in interviews held with him. Indeed, thanks to this useful exchange of ideas and knowledge it is possible to understand his personal perspective on the matter of Shintō itself, how San Marino perceived it then and perceives it now, the role and the rhetoric Jinja Honchō used in order to bring this project to life.

Thus, first of all an introduction to the gūji of the San Marino Jinja is needed. Francesco Brigante, born in Italy in the 4th October 1961 but naturalised to the San Marino nationality, always had a strong interest in the Asian philosophies and cultures. Even though he got raised in a Roman Catholic environment he could never answer his own personal questions about existence with the religious resources of his motherland. This is the reason why in his young adult years he found and started getting closer to the Buddhist mindset. A complete adherence to this Asian religion took place during the early '80s in the time he settled down in the country of San Marino and he started studying at the University of Tourism in the adjacent Italian city of Rimini.

43 See at <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

44 See at <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

Then, in the years following the successful graduation at the University and starting a new career in hotel management in the Republic of San Marino, Brigante started for a decade of his life a long series of trips through all the most crucial places of the Buddhist Asia. As he stated in an interview in April 2017, he really wanted to find answers to his own life questions directly seeking them at their cultural roots, and not assimilated through any kind of filter. Although he could not find his way in more extreme expressions of the Buddhist lifestyle, like in Tibet for instance, eventually the visit to Japan has marked his confrontation with the kind of Buddhism he felt closer to. In particular, to Zen Buddhism, and the confrontation with a philosophy of living that he could better identify with.

Nevertheless, Brigante's relationship with Buddhism was not meant to last long, as he decided to not consider himself part of it in 1993, because of the birth of his daughter and a progressive realisation of his impossibility to attain a complete detachment to the worldly things. Although he could not refer to himself as a complete adherent to the Buddhist faith, Brigante's main principles did not change and unchanged was his pursuit for a way of living, which could connect his own mindset to his lifestyle. Therefore, what was going to happen was his encounter with Shintō, which took place in San Marino itself at the beginning of 2001. During a period of political changes in the leadership of the Republic, he had the chance to meet the general consul of San Marino in Japan, Manlio Cadelio⁴⁵, who came just back in the Republic from Japan. Thanks to this encounter, Brigante had the opportunity to discover Shintō, since Cadelio himself got involved more and more to Jinja Honchō and its political party in Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party. In particular, this encounter happened exactly in the specific development process of Jinja Honchō's *Weltanschauung*. As already seen in the first chapter of this research a lot of debate took place in the last fifty years in the academical environment of religious studies concerning world religions. Thence, after decades of theoretical confrontations about also the essence of Shintō, Jinja Honchō started developing a new background rhetoric in order to restore the *kami* worship system to what they perceived as its original way of living, closer to nature and the seasons.

It is in this cultural environment that the ambassador of San Marino in Japan proposed to the committee of the Jinja Honchō to open the first official shrine in Europe precisely in San Marino, which always depicted and proposed itself as the Republic of Freedom. As Brigante himself pointed out indeed, San Marino has always been closer to its own founder saint, St. Marino, than the Catholic Roman Church nor the Pope, throughout all

⁴⁵See at <http://www.esteri.sm/on-line/home/corpo-diplomatico-e-consolare-sammarinese/annuario.html>, as visited 1st December 2017.

its centuries of independence history from the surrounding Italian country. For this reasons Cadelio thought that San Marino would have been the perfect location for the shrine, as it would have not created a lot of cultural resistance to the project, and as it was not a strongly Catholic environment as Italy, for instance. Thence, the Jinja Honchō agreed and an intense exchange of ideas began between these two countries so far away in geographical and cultural terms, through the mediation of the JSFS, Japan-San Marino Friendship Society⁴⁶.

Nevertheless, in order to have a shrine in San Marino, Jinja Honchō needed a gūji in the first place. That is why Cadelio proposed Brigante for the role, as he was learning more and more about Shintō, and finally he was finding himself deeply connected to it. Indeed, Brigante started getting closer to the idea of Shintō that Jinja Honchō was presenting in those years, and in the following period he got educated to this new ecological religion. At the beginning of his journey, he got introduced to the *kami* worshipping through the reading of several texts, which have been explained to him in their more difficult passages directly by Jinja Honchō in a long correspondence process. Then, after deciding to fully adhere to this “religion” and project he got invited by the Association directly in Japan, where he could begin his specific training to become the gūji of the next-to-be inaugurated San Marino Jinja.

Obviously, most of the texts referred by Brigante in the interview portray the complex of the *kami* worshipping rituals under the perspective of those Shintō features analysed in the second chapter. For instance, one of the main books that Brigante quoted is *Shintō the Kami Way*⁴⁷ by Sokyō Ono, in which the author introduces Shintō as the indigenous faith of the Japanese people, with its unique amalgamation of attitudes and communal behaviours intended to pay respect to the sacred spirits of nature and to maintain harmony in society. It would be redundant to underline further why most of those statements are effectively arguable, however, they constitute the theoretical base on which Jinja Honchō developed its “ecological paradigm” and trained Brigante to his priesthood.

In particular, this took place during the summer of 2010, when the Association of the Shintō shrines decided to invite Brigante directly in Japan to solve his last essence about the essence of this tradition and to learn all the ceremonies, rituals, cultural background, which would be needed to inaugurate the site in Europe. Thus, during his permanence in the mountains of the sacred Dewa Sanzan 出羽三山, Brigante entered in contact with the whole complex ritualistic system of *kami* worshipping, from learning by heart the pivotal norito 祝詞 (spoken prayers) in Classical Japanese, to learning how to lead all the different kinds of

46 See at <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/> as visited 1st December 2017.

47 Ono, Sokyō. *Shintō the Kami Way*. Tuttle Publishers. Tokyo. 1962.

ceremonies required from a *gūji*. There, he totally fell in love with this idea of Shintō which promotes the respect of nature and its powers, learned how to perform all the several kinds of ceremonies required, from inaugurating new factories to traditional Japanese weddings.

Therefore, the project of a first officially recognised and sponsored *jinja* in Europe was coming to its accomplishment. But far from being easily approved by the political board of the San Marino Republic it would have taken the JSFS four years more to complete the project. Indeed, in that period of time San Marino was mainly managed by the Roman Catholic party of *Comunione e Liberazione*, leaded by a really suspicious attitude toward the inauguration of a Japanese shrine in a supposedly Christian country like San Marino. However, after years of political confrontations, the proposal of the project got accepted by the board and all the practical resolutions started taking pace.

This could happen only because the shrine got eventually introduced to the political board as a monument in respect of the victims of the Tohoku great earthquake, which ideally connected Japan to the countries of San Marino and Italy, recently affected by a dramatic and destructive earthquake in the adjacent Italian region of Emilia-Romagna. According to the *gūji*, Brigante, himself the monument idea is not anyway far away from the meaning of the Shintō shrine, as it should remember to the visitor the great power of nature and educate to the respect of it. Although under the light of the counter-arguments presented previously it looks inconsistent to call the San Marino *Jinja* a secular monument, in memory of the victims of earthquakes, and a shrine, where actual *kami* worshipping rituals are performed, this terminologic compromise led to the creation of the *jinja*. This is also the reason why there is such a strong discrepancy in terminology in the different pages of the official website of the shrine.

Then, focusing now on the practical aspect of the construction, the designed place is the Podere di Lesignano, in the middle of the green country-side of the Serravalle area of this little independent country. The design of the shrine site followed all the ritual rules with strict attention to the details. The Podere di Lesignano has been selected because of the great quantity of natural woods and nature still present on that mountain area. There, all the fundamental natural elements for a shrine are featured: from the mountain itself, to a great amount of vegetative life and water, with the presence of a small lake and river. The structure of the physical shrine itself is built with the woods from the Ise area, and in particular the wood used for San Marino derives directly from the forestal resource of the Ise Jingū itself. The little shrine has been built first in Japan, with the supervision of *Jinja Honchō*, then deconstructed, transferred and re-built in the Independent Republic of San Marino. In fact,

not only the shrine is made with the wood from the shrine of the Japanese goddess of the sun, but also the San Marino shrine is meant to be vowed to Amaterasu Omikami. As Brigante claimed, this was meant to give the idea of a Shintō sparkle shining in the heart of Europe, contributing to the ecological consciousness of these two first world countries.

3.5 The San Marino Jinja, a consistent instance of the “ecological paradigm”

What appears clear at the end of this chapter is that the ideology behind the San Marino Jinja appears more strongly related to the new rhetoric promoted by Jinja Honchō in portraying Shrine Shintō as a global religion of ecology, than with the ancient *kami* beliefs. As a proof of this, it is just necessary to spot how articles about ecological issues related to Shintō, conferences like the one held at Ise Jingū in collaboration with ARC, or the project of the San Marino Jinja itself, all started existing just recently, in the same period of time.

Since the beginning of its existence, Jinja Honchō has been having close contacts with exponents of right-wing parties and promoting ideas connected with the emperor central role in the Japanese social scenario. And indirectly, the supremacy role played by the Japanese people in promoting an harmonious approach to ecological issues, with their Shintō religion, apparently unique expression of their culture. Thus, it is not a surprise to see how related is their propaganda on a global stage, and this new rhetoric, which could match their conservative political positions and an ecological inter-religious discourse.

Surely at the very beginning it would have seemed strange to think of any legitimacy in a European Shintō shrine, without any detailed research in the matter of the *kami* worship traditions. Nevertheless at this point, the whole process of creation of Shintō, and its development process to an institutionalised religion should be clear. As well as clear should be how the Shintō backstage main actor, Jinja Honchō, shaped and continues shaping Shintō throughout time. On a historical perspective, it is possible to see how Shintō was originally institutionalised in order to differentiate the *kami* beliefs from all the several traditions which developed blended throughout Japan, from Buddhism to Taoism. Yet, in the last decades the Honchō managed to portray it as an interfaith religion, which always existed in perfect harmony with Buddhism in the Japanese religious scenario. Not only the concept of Shintō itself is ambiguous, but also its representation as the prototype of perfect interfaith philosophy. Quoting the official site itself, indeed, the main idea portrayed is that: “Lo Shintoismo è

notoriamente una cultura pacifista ed aperta a ogni tipo di credo” (“Shintō is notoriously a peaceful culture, open to any different religion”)⁴⁸.

This rhetoric can be found in all the recent projects undertaken in Japan, as well as in the education to Shintō history provided to their new priests. Thanks to the interviews and correspondence held with the San Marino Jinja’s gūji, Francesco Brigante, it has been possible for me to confirm how strong is the influence of Jinja Honchō in the formation and management of Shintō and its shrines. Even though the “ecological paradigm”, as Rots defines it in his study, is a product of just the last few decades, it pervades the theoretical background of Brigante and the project of the shrine in San Marino.

This critical approach of mine to the rhetoric proposed by Jinja Honchō is meant to understand fully the background of this phenomenon, not to express any opinion about it being a right or wrong kind of rhetoric. Aim of this research is to understand how is it possible to think of a Shintō shrine outside the country for which it has been originally established for. In order to do so it was important to differentiate the indigenous *kami* cults to what is considered Shintō, first. And second, to understand how Shintō went through a process of continuous conceptual re-shaping throughout time, until analysing one of the last main ideological positions like the “ecological paradigm”, which is pivotal to the understanding of the San Marino Jinja’s construction. Although I argue the historical inconsistency of most of the theories which represent the cultural system defined as Shintō religion, this is its recent theoretical background both in Japan and in Europe.

48 See the Italian version of the website, <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com>, as visited 1st December 2017.

Chapter 4

4.1 The San Marino Jinja and a Japanese shrine in comparison

In this last chapter of the research it should be clear how and why the San Marino Jinja has been constructed on a theoretical level, and how it is not only impossible to think of a shrine in Europe, but it is absolutely coherent with the new propaganda presented by its institutional association. Thus, what will be featured in this section is a comparative analysis between the San Marino Jinja and a shrine in Japan, on a practical perspective. In order to do so, I will initially introduce the case of a Japanese shrine, in particular the Ise Jingū, and present its characteristics: from the people who maintain the shrine alive; the means that the shrine must have in order to guarantee its own future existence and development; its purpose, rituals and meanings. The main source for this analysis will be the study by Inoue Nobutaka, who examined the system behind shrines throughout Japanese history.

On one hand, Inoue's study can be strongly criticised after the reading of the recent debate about the religious inconsistency of Shintō, because in his studies he promotes the idea that there has always been a continuity in it throughout time. On the other hand, his analysis could be considered still a reliable source in the matter of understanding the operating systems behind shrines. In his process of portraying a continuous Shintō entity existing throughout all the shapes that *kami* worship took in Japanese history, he surely managed to give a detailed representation of how shrines worked differently in every historical period. Therefore, it is a useful source to understand how shrines might work in Japan still nowadays, although every information related to Shintō itself and its religious entity must be taken with academical criticism.

Therefore, right after the presentation of how a Japanese shrine operates and exists in its original environment, the analysis of the specific San Marino Jinja will be featured. As for the autochthonous case, the examination will be concerning the people who constitute the shrine cultural system, the means it uses to exist and develop; and the complex of ideas and teaching proposed to the visitors of the shrine itself. The main source for this part of the chapter is going to be the interview held with Brigante and the media used by the San Marino Jinja and its institution, the JSFS, to promote the shrine and its events.

The result will make it clear if the San Marino Jinja is not just a legit example of a *kami* worship site in Europe on a theoretical perspective, but if it is also active on a practical level as a native Japanese one.

4.2 An instance of a Japanese shrine: the Ise Jingū

In order to develop an analysis of the *modus operandi* of the historically most important shrine in Japan, there will be presented: first, a brief introduction to the *jinja* itself and its historical background; second, an analysis of what Inoue defines as “constituents”⁴⁹, in other words, the people who maintain the system alive, themselves possibly divided in makers and users of it; third, an analysis of its “hard network”⁵⁰, with a description of its physical structure, from the buildings to the fundamental elements of a shrine; fourth, an analysis of its “soft network”⁵¹, which is the institutional agents taking action behind it; fifth, a presentation of the “substance”⁵² promoted by the shrine, which is essentially the teachings of the system, its purpose, rituals and meanings.

The history of the Ise Jingū dates back to the mythological times of the country, as it is one of the most ancient sites of Japan being still fully active. As the English version of the website of the Grand shrine itself presents its legendary foundation: “Amaterasu-Omikami was originally worshipped in the Imperial Palace by successive Emperors of Japan. However, during the reign of the 10th Emperor Sujin, the Holy Mirror (the symbol of Amaterasu-Omikami) was moved from the Imperial Palace. Then, during the reign of the 11th Emperor Suinin, the Emperor ordered his princess, Yamatohime-no-mikoto, to seek the most appropriate place to permanently enshrine and worship Amaterasu-Omikami. After searching in many regions, finally the princess received a revelation that Amaterasu-Omikami should be enshrined and worshipped eternally in Ise. It is approximately 2,000 years ago. In the era of the 21st Emperor Yuryaku, about 1,500 years ago, Toyo'uke-no-Omikami was, in accordance with another revelation from Amaterasu-Omikami, summoned from the north of Kyoto prefecture and enshrined in Ise”⁵³ Nevertheless, historically speaking, the site complex is thought to date back to the late 1st century BCE, although the main building followed the ritual tradition of being demolished and reconstructed every 20 years, as still happens nowadays with the last reconstruction in 2013.

However, on a practical perspective following Inoue’s pattern of analysing a shrine system, the Ise Jingū’s “constituents” are essentially the people who are responsible for keeping the system alive, in particular the priests of the site. The Association of Shintō

49 Inoue, Nobutaka, Ito Satoshi, and Endo Jun. *Shintō - A Short History*. 2003. Translated by Mark Teewen and John Breen. Routledge Curzon. Page 4.

50 Ibid. Page 4.

51 Ibid. Page 4.

52 Ibid. Page 4.

53 See at <https://www.isejingu.or.jp/en/about/index.html>, as visited 1st December 2017.

Shrine, as already presented previously, has indeed its main site in Ise Jingū, and is entitled to educate and train the priests and priestesses of the most sacred shrine in Japan, as well for all the other sites. Generally, these roles have been held by former members of the imperial family. This is still true nowadays with Kuroda Sayako, daughter of the Emperor Akihito, entitled chief priestess of the Ise Jingū on 19th June 2017⁵⁴, after her aunt, Ikeda Atsuko, fourth daughter of the Emperor Shōwa.

Regarding the aspect of the “network”, the “hard networks” of the Ise Jingū are all the physical elements like shrine structure, properties and headquarters of the religious group, and they are the several sites which constitute the huge premise of the Jingū. Therefore, it is important to introduce some main necessary elements about the physical structure of a shrine. As Mason explains in her art history textbook: “The elements essential to the worship of a kami are first of all the *iwakura*, the natural site at which he or she has taken up residence. The *iwakura* is usually represented by a wooden shrine within an enclosure, to which a special type of gate, or *torii*, gives access. *Torii* are two posts surmounted by two lintels with a slightly concave curve”⁵⁵ The precinct of Ise Jingū presents all the necessary natural elements, from the massively wooded hills to water elements, representing the model of a kami worship complex. The structure consists of an outer shrine, called *geku*, and an inner shrine, *naiku*, dedicated directly to Amaterasu. The cobbled-stone pathway to the main buildings follows a river and presents other necessary elements like the *temizuya*, a narrow stone water-filled basin for purifying the hands and mouth of the visitor. The main shrine is enclosed in several levels of wooden fences, through which is impossible to see and only the priests and members of the imperial family have access to it. The *honden* (main hall), is in the middle of this precinct, featuring two treasure storages, the east and west halls. As Mason states also: “Although the *honden* itself is of a construction that dates back to Yayoi-type granaries, many of the other buildings are of much later structural styles—at present reflecting the architecture of the Edo period (1615-1868), such as a ceremonial rice granary, stable, support buildings for the priesthood and the administration of the shrine, and a hall for the performance of the sacred dances known as the *kagura*”⁵⁶. The materials used are, however, cypress, cedar and thatch with several metal decorations, and the several buildings included in the premises of the Jingū feature no external sculptures or intricate designs⁵⁷.

54 See at https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/21/national/politics-diplomacy/emperors-daughter-becomes-supreme-priestess-ise-shrine/#.Wi_BZ9-nGxn, as visited 1st December 2017.

55 Mason, Penelope. *History of Japanese Art*. Pearson; 2nd edition. 2004. Page 54.

56 Ibid. Page 56.

Simplicity and smoothness are the key-words of this style, called *shinmei zukuri*, which represented the major model for all the following shrines throughout the country.

This is also the main site of Jinja Honchō itself, the main actor engaged in the shrine and in general Shintō matters, which constitute the “soft network” of the shrine. After its institution in 1940, with the disbandment of the former Jingiin, and the recognition of Shintō as a religious legal person in 1945, it promoted Shintō both on the educational and doctrinal perspective through its events, conferences, publishings and documents. Some instances of them are the already quoted document *Keishin Seikatsu no Koryo* (“Principles for a life of kami reverence”), events like the inter-faith ecological event in collaboration with ARC in 2014, or even the San Marino Jinja’s project itself.

Eventually, regarding the substance of the Ise Jingū’s operating system, it is important to remember the “ecological paradigm”, already discussed in the third chapter of this research. Through the Ise Jingū and all the other 80,000 sites of what is defined as Shintō, Jinja Honchō promotes it as a new faith of ecology, possibly connecting all the countries of the world through their rituals to sacred woods and nature. “Representing spiritual, ecological, and cultural continuity between the present and the imagined ancestral past (and, if preserved well, the future), the shrine grove has come to be seen as the number one focal point of a local community—both physical, as meeting place and center of cultural and commercial activities, and symbolic, signifying social cohesion and spatial belonging”⁵⁸.

4.3 An instance of an European shrine: San Marino Jinja

In this section of the chapter about the practical reality of the shrine in San Marino, the study will follow a similar pattern to the one presented in the previous paragraphs, about the ideal *jinja* model, the Ise Jingū. After a brief resume about the background of the shrine, there will be featured: first, the “constituents” of this European Shintō site; second, a presentation of its “hard network”, with a description of the physical elements of the site; third, an introduction of the “soft network”; fourth, the “substance” of the shrine, as promoted through events, fliers, web-media and documents.

⁵⁷ Maré, Estelle A. Creation and Re-creation: The origins and preservation of the Shintō Shrines at Ise, Japan, and the abbey church of St. Michael at Hildesheim, Germany. *Religion and Theology*, Volume 11, Issue 2, pages 161 – 180. Page 168

⁵⁸ Rots, Aike Peter. *Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation. The Shintō Environmentalist paradigm and the rediscovery of Chinju no Mori*. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 42/2: 205-233. Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. Page 219.

As it was possible already to read previously, the shrine of San Marino is situated in the highly forested Podere Lesignano area of Serravalle. It is the first officially recognised Shintō site in Europe, and has been inaugurated the 21st June 2014 with the presence of approximately 150 personalities from the Jinja Honchō itself. Among them, remarkable is the presence of personalities like Yoko Kishi, mother of the current Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. In addition to the fact that it has been shaped as a smaller version of the Ise Jingū, the San Marino Jinja is dedicated also to the same deity, the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami.

Regarding the “constituents” of the San Marino shrine’s system, who is in charge of the maintenance of the shrine is without doubt the gūji, Francesco Brigante. In addition to have been trained and educated for the position directly by Jinja Honchō in Japan, he is the one taking physically care of the site, with the support of the Japan-San Marino Friendship Society, JSFS. The latter is responsible of the creation and promotion of several events concerning the site, from the annuary event Nippon Matsuri, in collaboration with the Republic, the anniversary celebration of the shrine, to comicon festivals, and so on⁵⁹.

Then, on the perspective of the “hard network”, the physical premises of the site, it is important to notice the presence of all the natural elements of a Japanese *iwakura*. The San Marino Jinja, indeed, includes a mountainous area, a big quantity of indigenous flora and imported one from Japan, and also several water features like the small lake aside of the *honden*. To reach the shrine on the top of the hill, the visitor has to follow a cobbled-stone pathway, passing through all the fundamental elements like the stone *torii* at the entrance, and the *temizuya* basin to cleanse their mouth and hands. The main building of the shrine presents the same structure of the ideal shrine model, the Ise Jingū, with its Yaei period raised granary structure. It is not an exact copy of the Jingū’s *honden* as its style, *shinmei zukuri*, is specifically designed for that site, as it was established already during the reconstructions of the holy site in Yayoi period⁶⁰.

The institution which constitutes the “soft network” of the *jinja* is mainly the same one of the Japanese model, the Jinja Honchō, which supported and sponsored this JSFS’s project from its very beginning.

Eventually, regarding the “substance” aspect, the main doctrine promoted by the shrine and its agents follows similarly the Japanese one. Mainly following the ideas promoted by the Japanese diplomat Hideaki Kase⁶¹, the San Marino Jinja supports the idea of a

59 See at <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/eventi/>, as visited 1st December 2017

60 Mason, Penelope. *History of Japanese Art*. Pearson; 2nd edition. 2004. Page 56.

61 See at <http://www.ubraintv.com/watch.php?id=728>, as visited 1st December 2017.

humankind's return to a sincere respect of nature and what it is claimed to be its manifestations, the *kami*. Quoting his words on the English website: "Shintō places great value in the virtues of purity and honesty, yet as faith, Shintō has no dogma, doctrine, or founder. Its origins can be seen in the relationship between the ancient Japanese and the power they found in the natural world. It is a relationship that continues to this day, defined by a great reverence for nature's bounty. Only by both receiving the blessings of nature and accepting its rage can we maintain a harmonious connection to the world around us. Shintō has shaped the past as an integral part of Japan's cultural heritage. It will continue to shape the future through the deep influence it exerts on Japanese thought. Yet, as a fundamental aspect of daily life in Japan, the focus of Shintō is on the present. For honoring the Kami, and receiving their blessings, there is no time but now"⁶².

4.4 Final practical considerations

At the end of this presentation of two different sites of Shintō, what is possible to confirm is that the San Marino Jinja represents actively an instance of legitimate shrine in Europe. In addition to the fact that it has been officially recognised by this constructed religion's main institution, Jinja Honchō, it features important similarities to the Japanese main model for Shintō shrines. These include the physical structure of the shrine itself and its surrounding environments, as well as the rituals performed and the doctrines promoted.

Even though at the beginning of this study the focal point has been to deconstruct Shintō itself, result of what Jinja Honchō is still portraying as a continuative religion, it would be wrong to affirm that the San Marino one is not a successful experiment of a *jinja* outside Japan. It was important to outline the historical background of *kami* beliefs in Japan, to be able to distinguish them to Shinto, but however, that does not mean that the word Shintō and its surrounding ideologies must be excluded by the academic discourse altogether. Keeping in mind its limits and inconsistencies, it is still a useful umbrella term to refer to the whole complex of doctrines brought to life after Meiji Restoration, and in particular by Jinja Honchō, from the 50s. Under this perspective it has been especially useful in order to understand better the development of the new rhetorics, which themselves brought to life projects like the San Marino Jinja. Therefore, if we refer to Shintō as a different cultural reality from the *kami* folk beliefs, it is possible to affirm that the San Marino Jinja is effectively operating as a Japanese Shintō shrine, both on a theoretical and practical level.

62 See at <https://www.sanmarinojinja.com/en/>, as visited 1st December 2017.

Furthermore, also the public of the shrine adhere to this new rhetoric and, it follows the same patterns as Japanese shrines visitors. The general guest of the San Marino Jinja indeed, does not necessarily visit the site on a regular base. According to Brigante, the majority of the people who visit regularly the site at specific moments of the year are just the Japanese expatriates, who love to find a little corner of their motherland in the middle of Italy. On the contrary, the majority of the visitors of the shrine are the ones curious to experience a piece of Japan, or getting closer to what they have been told about Shintō. Far away from being concerned about the historical background of what they believe being an exotic expression of nature-loving religiosity, a lot of Japanese pop-culture aficionados continue to approach the premises of the *jinja* to feel closer to this distant land. For most of them it is not important to adhere completely to the doctrine promulgated in the last decades by Jinja Honchō, as much as feeling part to that world, which is the main subject of their personal passions. That is the reason why, still according to the claims of Brigante, most of the people who participate to the rituals and events of the San Marino shrine are young people, mainly in their teenagehood or young adult years. Mostly, not really because of a particular devotion to the kami belief itself, but brought to the Shintō site and experience by the desire to take part to the world they enjoy in manga, anime, and several other Japanese pop media.

Again, this is another feature which legitimise the San Marino Jinja in its similarity to a native shrine. As the recent studies about *contents tourism* in Japan have been demonstrating, pop-culture has been moving huge masses of people to shrines and depopulated areas. This is for example what happened with the 2013 Taiga Drama about the life of Niihama Yae (the “Bakumatsu Joan of Arc”, who fought in defence of the Aizu-Wakamatsu Castle during the Boshin War, 1868-9), which was going to be set on purpose in the Aizu-Wakamatsu area, Fukushima prefecture, highly affected by the disastrous earthquake of the 2011. The result was that a huge group of visitors, fans of the tv-drama, gathered in the area, which suffered of an enormous rate of depopulation in the aftermath of the natural disaster in the Tohoku region⁶³.

Not different from the Japanese case, the governative board of the Republic noticed through the few years of its existence, how useful the San Marino Jinja could be to increase tourism in the most agricultural area left in the country. For this reason, every year more and more events continue to be organised in connection to JSFS to promote the San Marino Jinja

⁶³ Scarles, Caroline; Lester, Jo-Anne. *Mediating the tourist experience: from brochures to virtual encounters*. Series: Current developments in the geographies of leisure and tourism. 2013. Page 119.

and convey visitors to the Serravalle area, plenty of agritourism related facilities. As Caroline Scarles and Jo-Anne Lester underline in their study of the contents tourism phenomenon: “contents tourism is not only a form of tourism for young people in Japan, with older visitors continuing to demonstrate a fascination with their own (and others) versions of popular culture and the layers of meaning this can provide. By looking at popular culture tourism in terms of its contents and meaning, we can take the notion of contents tourism beyond Japan, using it as a framework from which to consider the relationship between tourism and culture of the day and other cultures and arts of the world”⁶⁴.

64 Scarles, Caroline; Lester, Jo-Anne. *Mediating the tourist experience: from brochures to virtual encounters*. Series: Current developments in the geographies of leisure and tourism. 2013. Page 121.

Conclusion

In this study the phenomenon of exporting a legit instance of a Shintō shrine outside Japan was addressed. However, at the very beginning of the research several apparent characteristics of Shintō were obstructing even the chance to imagine it possible. For instance, because Shintō, as it is described in several academic and non-academic sources, appeared to be an exclusive nationalistic religion strictly connected with the Japanese soil and the being Japanese. Acknowledging the existence of an actual shrine in San Marino, officially recognised by Shintō main institution Jinja Honchō, the question which opened this research could not be any other than wondering how could be possible to globalise Shintō. And furthermore, how similarly to the native model an European shrine would operate.

What has been demonstrated throughout the first part of this research is that not all these claims are actually historically accurate or consistent, after all. Indeed, it is possible to affirm that there was nothing like Shintō before the encounter of Japanese culture with the Western concept of religion, and the creation of a cultural entity like Shintō in Meiji period. First, it has been created as a national science, then recognised as a religious legal person after the Second World War. Nevertheless, as demonstrated there has been never been historical proof of any continuative religious categorisation of it, or even of it preserving itself without any influence from foreign cultures.

Therefore, on a theoretical level, no obstacles would justify an impossibility of globalising this constructed religion defined as Shintō. On the contrary, through the following part of the research it has been possible to study the new rhetorics by Jinja Honchō, aiming to promote a new global and ecological perspective on Shintō. Not only this has been proved by international events like the one held at Ise Jingū, but also by the inauguration of the San Marino Jinja itself. This, in particular, is a physical proof of a successful promotion of the “ecological paradigm” which brought an increasing popularity of the Japanese religion among internationals and Japanese people.

Then, by comparing the San Marino Jinja to the most sacred shrine of Japan, the Ise Jingū, it has been possible to understand that the shrine in San Marino is also an effectively legit practical result of an exportation of Shintō.

Eventually, what can be said about the possibility of globalising Shintō is that it is not only possible, but that it is actually one of the core aims of the Jinja Honchō in the recent decades scenario. Quoting Aike P. Rots, just because it has been demonstrated that Shintō is

not the most indigenous or continuative religion of Japan, “that does not mean, however, that the term is merely an empty signifier that should be excluded from scholarly analysis altogether. In the modern period, it serves an important function as a generic category covering a variety of institutions usually called jinja 神社 or jingū 神宮 (conventionally referred to as “shrines” in English), as well as associated ritual and discursive practices. Today, ‘Shintō’ stands out as a very real presence in Japanese society, even though its category boundaries have never been clearly defined, and the societal and political position of institutions and practices referred to by this term has gone through significant transformations”⁶⁵. Once we have outlined what really Shintō is, and we accept it with any hypothetical political purposes of Jinja Honchō, it is however legit to confirm that Shintō is actually possible to globalise, as a result of an official and actual shrine in Europe.

65 Rots, Aike Peter. Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation. *The Shintō Environmentalist paradigm and the rediscovery of Chinju no Mori*. Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 42/2: 205-233. Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. Page 212.

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